

Editor
BALKAR SINGH

ESSENTIAL POSTULATES OF SIKHISM



**PUBLICATION BUREAU
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA**

**ESSENTIAL POSTULATES
OF
SIKHISM**

Guru Nanak Commemorative Lectures 1982 & 85

Essential Postulates of Sikhism

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**SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB STUDIES DEPARTMENT
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FOREWORD

This small venture, "The Essential Postulates of Sikhism" is a collection of only two lectures delivered annually in the series of Guru Nanak Commemorative lectures under the auspices of the department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Dr. Gobind Singh Mansukhani delivered two lectures i.e. "The Poetry of Guru Nanak" and "The Kirtan of Guru Nanak" in 1982. Dr. Mansukhani is a widely travelled sikh scholar and his contribution to Gurmat literature is an established fact. The second lecture included in this book was delivered in 1985. The author Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia is known for his keen interest in the philosophical aspect of sikh studies. His writings though controversial have received full respect and attention. The title of this book has been taken from the caption of his lectures "Essential Postulates of Sikhism And their Sociological Significance" included in this book.

It is an accepted fact that the ultimate spiritual reality is beyond the cognition of man. The ultimate knowledge, being experiential in nature, comes only through the grace of the Guru. But yet it is enjoined on the sikhs or the students of sikhism to endeavour for the search of truth and live upto it. Though the truth is to be experienced at a mystic level, it has to find expression in ones behaviour. All human beings without any distinction are capable of this, of course by the grace of the Guru. For the Sikhs Sri Guru Granth Sahib is true and living Guru for all times. The department deems

it a moral duty to make all human beings aware of the authentic and infallible spiritual experience recorded by the great masters themselves. This book is an effort in this direction. The department is greatly obliged to Dr Bhagat Singh, the Vice Chancellor of this University, under whose able guidance and benign encouragement the project has been completed.

BALKAR SINGH

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Patiala.

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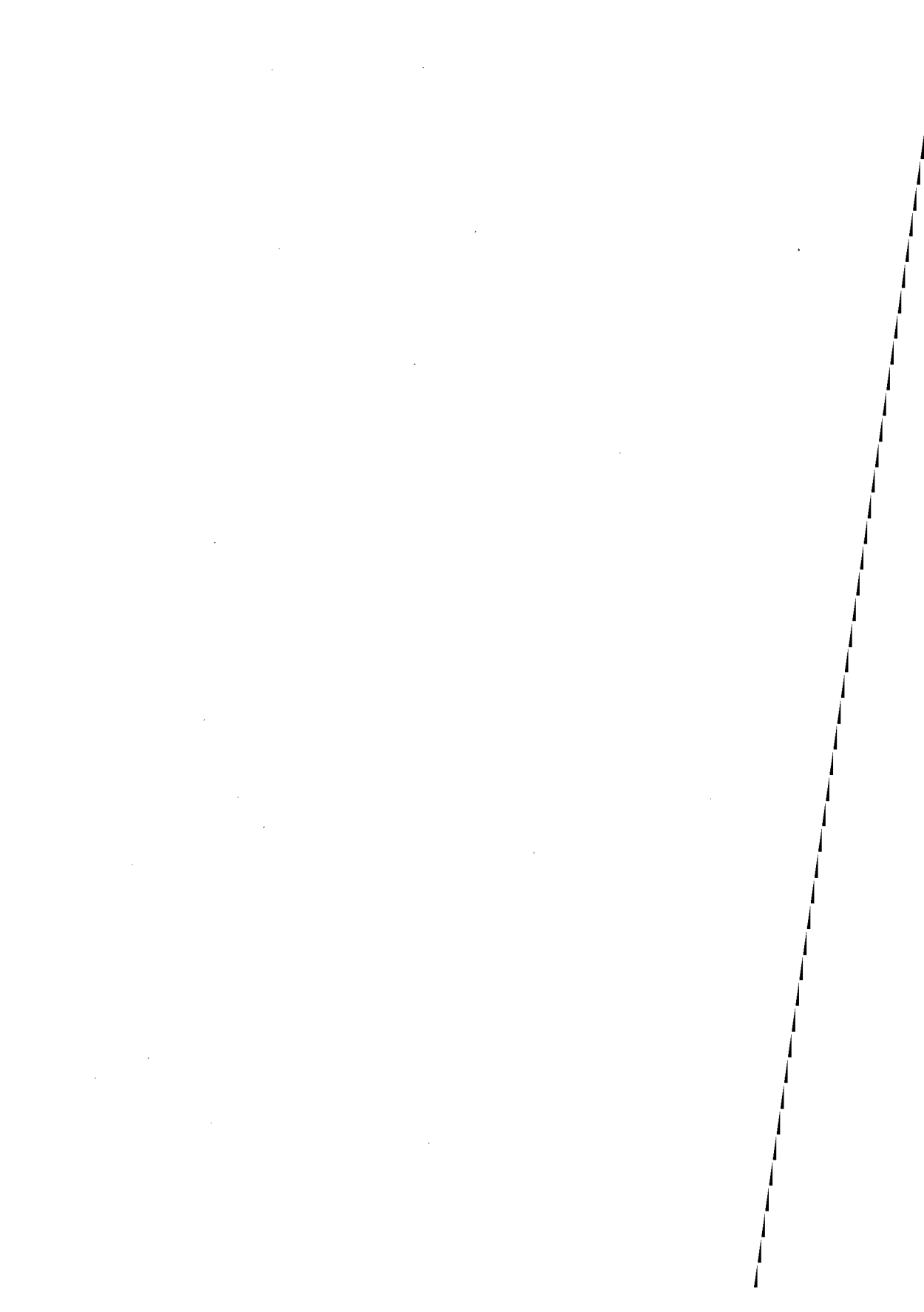
Lectures I & II

**Essential Postulates of Sikhism and
their Sociological Significance. 45**

I. THE POETRY OF GURU NANAK
II. THE KIRTAN OF GURU NANAK

Delivered by

DR. GOBIND SINGH MANSUKHANI



I

THE POETRY OF GURU NANAK

Guru Nanak's poetry is both multi-dimensional and universal. It deals with God, Nature, Man and the questions regarding life and death which have perturbed mankind for so many centuries. His poetry is like a vast ocean whose expanse and depth is impossible to fathom. Only one who is as great as Guru Nanak can measure his wisdom and spiritualism. However, with my limited intelligence, I have undertaken a survey of his poetry with some diffidence in order to point out those aspects which appear to be important and of value to every human being. Guru Nanak is called a *world-teacher*, a teacher of teachers, because he has something worthwhile to give to the learned and the unlearned, the privileged and the under-privileged. Moreover, the standards of poetic technique cannot be applied to divinely-inspired poetry. As such, we shall study together the thought and message of his poems and omit its diction and prosody. I shall try to interpret his poetry under five headings, though there will be some overlapping and some points may fall under two or three headings at the same time.

1. Poetry about contemporary life and practices.
2. Poetry of admonition and advice
3. Poetry of *Nature*

4. Poetry of *Sadhana* or spiritual development
5. Poetry of mystic vision and God-realisation

1. Poetry about contemporary life and practices.

A poet is a product of a certain age and environment. It is but natural that he must react to his times and in one way or the other, reflect it. Guru Nanak was born in an era of political instability and turmoil. It was the darkest period of medieval India. Guru Nanak describes his own times as follows :

“The age is like a knife
Kings are butchers,
The law has taken wings and flown;
In the dark night of falsehood,
I cannot espy the rising of the moon of truth,
I have searched everywhere and wearied of the quest,
In the dusk, I cannot find any path.
Pride that is within is the root of sorrow,
O Nanak ! how shall we be saved ?”¹

Guru Nanak was equally critical of the Lodhi rulers who oppressed their subjects and led a life of luxury and debauchery. He blamed them for their neglect in mustering forces to protect India against the Mughal hordes. He recognised the hand of God and the working of Providence in their downfall :

“A Kingdom that was a Jewel
Was wasted by the dogs (Lodhi rulers);
No one will mourn their deaths.”²

Similarly, the sufferings of the people were due to their lack of moral courage and the will to resist injustice and cruelty. People get the rulers they deserve, and as the rulers come to grief, so do their subjects. This is the working of the divine law. Similarly, Guru Nanak observed the moral decadence of his times, the hypocrisy of both the Hindus and the

Muslims—their practice of orthodoxy in contrast to their sycophancy and cowardice. The Islamic fanaticism and expansionism inflicted sufferings on the masses as much as Brahminical dogmatism and caste-taboos against their co-religionists. The Guru protested against social fragmentation and stratification which was symbolic of inner and outer slavery. His outcry against polytheism, ritualism and caste-consciousness was not destructive but constructive in spirit. He had remedies for social ills. He practised human brotherhood, social commitment and compassion. His egalitarianism and respect for the common man enabled him to show his care and concern for the lot and destiny of the masses. To show his love for his fellow-men, he established the first *Dharamsal* at Kartarpur with the twin object of *Sangat* (holy congregation) and *Pangat* (free kitchen). Wherever, he went, he preached the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God and his sympathy flowed naturally to those who needed it most.

Guru Nanak was a witness to the massacre at Saiyadpur where Babar's army decimated the local population. He was moved by the scene of huge loot, rape and slaughter and his anguished heart burst into a song :

“Babar came to Hindustan from Kabul,

His hordes are perpetrators of sin...

Muslim women recite the Quoran

And in anguish call on Allah,

Hindu women of high and low caste,

Suffer the same fate, O Lalo !”³

Guru Nanak applied the yard-stick of intellect and reason to the major prevailing practices and in an inimitable way showed the absurdity of the practices. He refused to wear the Hindu sacred thread because he wanted to know how it will make him good and virtuous. People

thought him crazy and sick and called a physician. He pointed to him his inner melody-the separation from God-which was causing him so much pain and suffering. He says about himself :

“Some people think that I am possessed by evil spirits,
Some say I am crazy and a forsaken man.

But I, the mad Nanak have lost reason in pursuit of
my Lord.”⁴

Guru Nanak regarded himself as a poet (*Shāir*) and he explained his own aim and object in the following words :

“O God ! My breath, flesh and soul, I belong to Thee.

I am deeply attached to Thee.

Nanak the poet, says that

Thou art the Sustainer of all life.”⁵

Guru Nanak's concern for the masses was reflected in his references to the social and political conditions of his time. He wanted to remove the superstition and exploitation prevalent in his age. His comments on the ritual of bathing, fasting, celibacy, penances, oblations and hypocritical conduct of the so-called religious people were intended to undermine ritualism and to inspire the people to the need of righteous behaviour and dynamic living. Similarly, his exposure of Muslim misrule and atrocity was motivated by the inexorability and rightness of the moral law prevailing in the universe.

Guru Nanak was aware of the inferior position which the society of the time assigned to woman. She had no right to learning or to worship. She was treated as a domestic and child-rearing slave. Widowhood was regarded as a curse; female infanticide and *Sati* were the order of the day. In short, Indian woman was treated as a pariah, the out-caste of society. He drew man's attention to her importance and her role in human relationships :

"It is woman who nurtures man to manhood,
It is through woman that he performs household duties
How can we speak ill of women who have given birth
to great men !"⁶

Guru Nanak exhorted woman to reject the veil and the fetters that stood in the way of their development-secular and spiritual.

2. Poety of Admonition and Advice

Guru Nanak's travels to different regions both in India and the Middle-East were motivated by his desire to seek the truth and to spread it among the people. He wrote :

"In search of saintly men, I became a wandering recluse,
In the hope of getting a vision of the Divine.

I donned the hermit's garb.

Truth is all the merchandise I have.

Nanak says, with the saintly, we shall cross the world-ocean."⁷

Guru Nanak conveyed the gist of his discussions with men of different cultures and values in his poems which are called *Gurbāni*. His sweet persuasiveness and simple logic appealed to the hearts of strangers. His message was simple; love your fellow beings, serving them is as good as worship, share your food with others and earn your livelihood with honest labour. The sincerity of his song won the hearts of the common man.

Guru Nanak did not turn a blind eye to the absurdities and hypocracies of his contemporaries. He admonished the performers of *Krishan Lilā* at Mathura who danced in an apparent frenzy to indicate their devotion, though their real purpose was to get offerings from the audience :

"The disciples participate, the Gurus dance,

Thump their feet and roll their heads;

Dust flies and falls on their hair,

The audience sees, laughs and goes home;
For the sake of money and food, the actors beat time,
And dash themselves against the ground.”⁸

Guru Nanak believes that God can be realised within oneself by true devotion and not by participating or witnessing religious performances meant for the display of theatrical skill and entertainment and for making money. Similarly, at Gorakhmata, Guru Nanak criticised the *Yogis* for their paraphernalia and austerities. He said :

“Yoga does not consist in a patched coat or in a Yogi’s staff; or in ashes smeared over the body.

Yoga consists not in ear-rings worn or a shaven head or the blowing of the horn.

Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world;

Thus you shall find the way of Yoga.”⁹

At Benaras the Guru met Pandit Chatur Das—a very learned Brahmin. When he asked the Guru as to how he might irrigate the barren mind, Guru Nanak used the metaphor of the Persian wheel for irrigation to clarify his point :

“Make God your well, string his name for the chain
Of water-pots and yoke your mind as an ox to it.

Irrigate with nectar and fill the pot therewith,

Thus you shall belong to the Gardener.”¹⁰

Some priests told Guru Nanak at Gaya to offer rice-balls and light little lamps for the comfort of his ancestors. Guru Nanak exposed their fallacy by arguing that, “When the body could be no more, how could it need the food and the light from a lamp ? If the body cannot go to the next world, how can any material thing of the world give comfort to the spirit.” He exhorted them to be rational :

“O people, do not make me an object of ridicule,

The flame of Divine Name can burn all sins,

Just as a spark of fire burns away tons of wood.”¹¹

At Mount Abu, Guru Nanak exhorted the *Digambar Jains* and *Munis* to give up their austerities and abominable practices :

“They (Jain monks) have their hair plucked out,
They drink dirty water,
They beg and eat others’ morsels,
They spread out their ordure and inhale its smell,.....

.....
Nanak, they who pluck their heads are devils,
These words of advice will not please them.”¹²

At Kanchi, when the priest asked the Guru to bow to their idols, the Guru refused to do so and said,

‘Why worship gods and goddesses ?
What can you ask of them ?
What can they give ?
The idols that you bathe and worship
O Brother, sink in water.”¹³

In his efforts to rid Hinduism of ritual, Guru Nanak debrahminised Hinduism and exhorted the people to establish a direct link between them and the Creator. The Brahmins exploited the superstition and credulity of innocent people by performing senseless and futile ceremonies just to make money. Guru Nanak advised the pilgrims assembled at various holy centres to keep away from Charlatans and hypocrites who traded in religion and to distribute their charity directly to the poor, the destitute and the handicapped. His main argument in all such matters was that people should use common-sense and act accordingly. He said,

“Use your intelligence in serving God and in gaining merit.

Use your brain to read and digest what you read and how to give in charity.

This is the only way; the rest is the work of the devil.”¹⁴
Guru Nanak met a Muslim saint named Mian Mitha near Sialkot. He asked the Guru to suggest to him a remedy for getting rid of the inner malady and suffering. The Guru prescribed the medicine through the use of metaphors :

“Pain is arsenic and God’s name the antidote;
Pound it in the mortar of contentment;
With the pestle of your charity.
If you take this medicine,
Your body will not pine away ;
Otherwise you will suffer the pangs
Of death at the final hour.”¹⁵

At Mecca, Guru Nanak held a discourse with the Muslim preachers. They asked him a leading question :
“Which of the two religions—Hinduism and Islam—is superior ?” To which the Guru gave the following befitting reply :

“Without good deeds, both Hindus and Muslims will
equally repent

And will not find a refuge in God’s grace.”¹⁶
God judges people not by labels but by actions. The priests were convinced by his arguments and recognised him as a godly person.

Guru Nanak’s poetry is meant for all types of men and women. He revealed spiritual truths to the rural folk in figurative and telling words. To a farmer, he explained good farming in the following words :

“The body is a field, let the mind be the plough-man,
Good deeds thy ploughing.
Let thine honest striving by the channels,
That irrigate the field;
Sow the seed of the Holy Name,
Make the clods of the field level with contentment,

Wear, as a farmer the peasant-garb of humility,
Then with the grace of God, His love will blossom,
Blessed is the peasant who farms in thiswise.”¹⁷

To a shop-keeper, he explained the secrets of spirituality in the language with which he was conversant :

“Our transient life in our shop,
And the Holy Name is the merchandise
With which we are entrusted,
Alertness of mind and purity of deed
Are the ware-houses in which to store the Name;
Let thy dealing be with the saints
They are sound reliable customers.
Take a fair profit and be happy.”¹⁸

To the bureaucrat, well versed in worldly ways and diplomatic strategy, he recommended honesty and strict performance of duty as service of God :

“Check thy mind from wandering after temptation,
Stand alert on God against all evil,
So from all men, thou shalt earn the praise,
And the Lord, thy King shall delight in thee.”¹⁹

Before a normal family-man Guru Nanak placed the picture of a true house holder :

“He is the true householder who controls his desires,
Who indulges in meditation, penance, discipline and
worship,
Who practises charity and alms and benevolence,
Such a householder is pure like Ganges water.”²⁰

So during his travels Guru Nanak preached and practised his doctrine of a useful and dynamic life, spent in the midst of worldliness but free from its filth and vice. It is possible to remain pure amidst the impurities of the world. Guru Nanak explained this idea through the metaphor of the *lotus* :

“Just as the lotus in the lake remains undisturbed by
the water,

Just as the duck is not made wet by floating in water,
In the same way by linking one's consciousness with the
Supreme consciousness,
Through utterance of the Holy Name, one crosses, the
world ocean."²¹

3. Poetry of Nature

Guru Nanak regards nature as the manifestation and abode of God. God created the *Sabad* (Holy Name), and then he created the cosmos. He states in the *Asa-di-var* :

"Next, the Lord created Nature and with great enthusiasm watched it from his seat."²²

Elsewhere Guru Nanak says :

"The Lord Himself creates and arranges the Universe and controls its evolution and its progress, because he himself is Immanent and Transcendent."²³

He explains the point further thus :

"In Nature we see the Lord,
In Nature we hear His speech,
Nature inspires the divine awe,
In Nature is the essence of joy and peace."²⁴

The expanse of Nature is unlimited and He alone knows its wealth and volume. Man can only see something of the power and manifestation of God in Nature. Guru Nanak takes a broad view of nature as the cosmic order :

"Mankind and arbors
Places of pilgrimage by river banks,
Clouds that float over farmers' fields,
Islands and spheres,
Continents and the universe,
the entire cosmos.
All that is born of egg and womb,
Born of water and sweat,
Of all these He alone hath estimate."²⁵

Guru Nanak draws lessons frequently from the objects of Nature. Apart from its apparent beauty, Nature has a suggestiveness for him. He finds in it love, sympathy, light, joy and peace. He sees the hands of God in the symmetry, contours and splendour of natural objects. The hills, the valleys, the flowers and fruits with their blossoms and fragrance fill him with wonder and joy. Guru Nanak often tells us what man has to learn from the objects of nature :

“The *simal* tree is huge and straight
But if one comes to it with hope of gain,
What will one get and whither turn ?
Its fruit is without taste,
Its flowers have no fragrance
Its leaves are of no use.
O Nanak, humility and sweetness
Are the essence of virtue and goodness.
Readily do we all pay homage to ourselves,
Before others we refuse to bow.”²⁶

One of the Guru Nanak's important poetic compositions on nature is *Bārāmāh*—the Song of the Twelve months. In this monthly calendar, he describes the sorrows and joys of the pilgrim-soul who like a love-lorn lady goes through the periods of storm and calm, of separation and hope of union. Nature intensifies the agony of separation, particularly in the extremes of hot or cold weather. However when there is a short meeting of the beloved with the lover or even the possibility of a tryst, nature appears to be wearing a cloth of gold. The moods of the month have both positive and negative effects on the soul's journey to its destination. The pattern of the poem of each month can be divided into three parts : 1. The actual phenomenon of nature, 2. Its effect on the human mind, 3. The means of union with the Lord.

Chet (March—April) is the season of spring but for the

beloved this is a period of separation :

“The *Koel* calls in the mango groves,
Her notes are full of joy;
But there is sorrow in my soul.”

But this sorrow can end when the Lord-lover meets her :

“Says Nanak, when the Lord her Master comes home
to her,
Then is spring seemly because she is fulfilled.”²⁷

The spring season is followed by the summer months—*Jeth* and *Asār* (May—June—July) with its scorching heat which increases the thirst for divine union. Then comes the rainy season—*Sāwan* & *Bhādon* (August and September), when everything is green and joyful, but the beloved has no peace or joy :

“The lightening strikes terror in my heart,
I stand all alone in my court-yard,
In solitude and sorrow.”²⁸

However the beloved keeps thinking of her Lord and this gives her an inner consolation :

“Nanak says, she alone is the true wife
Who loses herself in the Lord.”²⁹

Then comes *Asun* (*Asū*) (October and November), the season of autumn and the fall of leaves and twigs but the beloved must bide her time.

“It is *Asun*, says Nanak,
It is trysting time, O Lord,
And we have waited long.”³⁰

Then comes winter—(*Pokh*) (December—January) with its grey and misty look :

“As in the month of *Pokh*
Winters frost does freeze,
The sap in tree and bush, so does
The absence of the Lord

Kill the body and the mind,

O Lord, why don't you come ?"³¹

Then the wheel turns full circle and it is *Phalgan* (February—March). The bride has forgotten her-self in the love of the beloved spouse. Now she is keenly waiting for the coming of her Lord :

"When he wanted me I went

With garlands and strings of jewels and raiments of finery.

O Nanak, a bride welcomed in the Master's mansion

Hath found her true Lord and Love."³²

But the philosophising of nature and the inwardness of its significance does not mean that the Guru was not alive to the physical fascination of objects of nature. But more than its beauty and majesty Guru Nanak saw the hand of God in the scenes of nature. Nature also sings the praises of God in its own way. The *Ārti* is the song of Nature's adoration of the Almighty :

"The firmament is Thy salver,

The sun and moon Thy lamps;

The galaxy of stars as pearls strewn.

A mountain of sandal is Thy joss-stick,

Breezes that blow Thy fan;

All the woods and vegetation,

All flowers that bloom

Take their colours from Thy light."³³

The merit of Guru Nanak's nature poems lies in the irresistible link between the outer and the inner. The sight of an object of nature causes an excitation and this leads to an inward process which gives a new significance to nature. Behind the pattern and the colour of form is the fine frenzy of the poet and the wise passiveness of his vision which transmutes it into a point of light, reflecting the hand of the

Creator and the peace and joy, it brings in its train. His didacticism is transmuted into spiritual exaltation; his rainbow colours blend into the white light of truth and his spring water into nectar. To Guru Nanak, God's beauty appears irresistably through the veil of the nature and he goes into a trance.

4. The poetry of Sādhana or spiritual development

Guru Nanak was essentially a minstrel of God commissioned by Him to convey his message to the world. The Guru records his visits to the Divine Court and how he was commissioned :

“The mighty One instructed me :
Night and day, sing my praises;
The Lord did summon this minstrel
To His High Court,
On me He bestowed the robe of honour
Of those who exalt Him.”³⁴

As such, he conveyed the message of God to the masses; he reminded the people that each one had a divine essence which needed to be developed :

“Oh man, you are an embodiment of divine light
Recognise your origin.”³⁵
The divinity in man has been expressed in the form of a
riddle :
“The drop of water is in the sea
And the sea is in the drop of water;
Who shall solve the riddle ?”³⁶

Man is a part of God and his goal is to merge in Him. Guru Nanak puts his idea briefly in the *Japuji*.

“How to be a man of Truth and how to break the wall
of falsehood ?
To follow the will of God which is ingrained in man.”³⁷

To break the veil of illusion and attachment - *Maya* - the Guru suggests *Sādhanā*, a course of self-discipline. Through the procedure for the preparation of butter from milk, Guru Nanak tells us how to get better and purer.

“Cleanse the utensil, dry it up and then go for milk,
Let your actions be pure like milk and your meditation.
The heaven and then selflessly curdle it !
Remember only the Holy Name; all other actions are
futile.”³⁸

The Guru suggests a three fold course : listening to the instructions of a Guru or the Holy Name (*Suniai*), acceptance of and conviction in the truth of the Guru's World (*Maniai*) and carrying out the Guru's instructions in day-to-day life (*Nidhiāsan*). The later includes following a code of ethics and performance of acts of social good and public welfare. Man is not only to work for personal welfare, but also for the good of the community as a whole - *Sarbat-dā-bhallā*, because true worship of God is the service of His creation.

“The man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow,
And gives some of his gains in charity, know,
Says Nanak, the true way of life.” (A. G. p. 1245).

I would like to sum up Guru Nanak's *Sādhanā* under what I call the five S's of Sikhism, namely *Sevā*, (voluntary and selfless service), *Sadāchār* (character-building), *Sādh Sangat* (company of the good and the holy), *Sangeet* (performing or listening Kirtan), and *Simaran* (constant remembrance of God).

Guru Nanak mentions the five stages of man's progress on the path of divinity in the last section of the *Japuji* as under :

Dharam Khand : This is the realm of duty where a man discharges his responsibilities to himself, his family, community and country. This realm is governed by the law of

Karma. Man's deeds will determine his future. His worth depends on his moral and noble actions and hence the need of righteous conduct.

Giān Khand : This is the realm of knowledge where man realises the variety and vastness of God's creation—galaxies, the different kinds of beings and their ways of living. Man understands the limitation of science, which is based on physical matter and reasoning process. Though science has realised that the matter is energy, it has not even touched the tip of the ice-berg of these enormous sources of energy. The five basic elements—air, earth, water, fire and ether contain store-houses of energy. Storm energy and wind power have yet to be tapped. The earth has lots of minerals, geo-thermal energy, energy available from bio-matter and garbage. Similarly, tidal power, sea minerals and animals are potential sources of energy. The other source of energy is fire which takes the form of solar energy and volcanic energy. Ether, waves, electromagnetic waves, ozone layers etc. are yet to be exploited. Science has yet to make up the way and do a lot of research for utilising these potential sources of energy. All this shows that man has yet to acquire knowledge of many new subjects and sources of power.

Saram Khand : This is the realm of spiritual effort. When we follow the Guru's instructions and do *Sevā*, and *Simaran*, we mould ourselves on the pattern of God's qualities—Truth, Goodness, Justice, Compassion, etc. Man becomes, what he meditates on—*Jaisā Sewai Taisā Hoi*. Man's consciousness and intuition get evolved. He gets spiritual wisdom and becomes a sage or seer.

Karam Khand : This is the realm of grace. Man's efforts may not bear fruits. He may sow the seed, water the plant, but flood or frost may destroy the fruit. Hence, we must pray for God's grace. With divine grace, he gets a

vision of God's court (*Darbār*) and he becomes a *Gurmukh* or *Jeevan-Mukat*.

Sach khand : This is the realm of Truth. God is seen here in His beatitude watching the working of His creation. Here saintly beings are in tune with Him. It is difficult to describe God and His devotees.

The pilgrim's progress for inner sovereignty and God-realisation is an arduous uphill journey, the search of the *Holy Grail* as the Christians put it, a scaling of peak after peak to the Everest. First comes the foot-hills and then the scattering mists in the valleys and then the steep climb to the sun-lit summit. All this requires a lot of patience, perseverance, devotion and discipline.

The essence of Guru Nanak's message may be called *Nām Yoga*, The Guru explains it as under :

"First the Guru teaches the disciple repetition of God's Name,

This practice annihilates his ego,

Then he practises meditation on the Divine attributes and intones God's Name;

This intonation with love brings about his assimilation with the super-self;

In this stage, *Gurmukh* needs no yogic formalism for inspiration,

Only vivid perception of God's proximity procures fulfilment.

Nanak says that *Gurmukh* thus becomes omniscient."³⁹

Guru Nanak compares the moulding of a devotee to the minting of a perfect coin of Gold. The qualities of continence, patience, divine knowledge, wisdom, fear of God, prayer, austerity and love of the Holy Name make him a true man of God.

The characteristics of the ideal man are further clarified

by Guru Nanak in *Rāga Prabhāti* :

“Rare are such men in this world, whom after testing,
God has gathered unto His treasury.

They have rid themselves of the bonds of caste and
colour and given up greed and ‘mineness.’

Imbued with the Name, they have become sacred places
full of purity, having put an end to the filth and
misery of egoism;

Nanak washes the feet of such God-oriented saints in
whose hearts is enshrined the True One.”⁴⁰

5. The poetry of Mystic vision and God-Realisation :

Guru Nanak’s mystic vision was persistent throughout his life. The mystic communion with God is an intimate experience, irrespective of age or situation. His being intune with the Infinite is based on love and devotion. Tagore puts it thus : “The vision of the Supreme One in our soul is a direct and immediate intuition not based on ratiocination or demonstration at all.”⁴¹ Guru Nanak says that spiritual illumination is open to one and all :

“The learned and the illiterate can attain the highest
spiritual stage.”⁴²

The inspiration of divine love implies total submission and self-surrender by the individual. This love though expressed in terms of husband-wife relationship, is free from any physical element. Guru Nanak says :

“We are the brides of the Lord,
And bedeck ourselves for His pleasure,
But if we are proud of our beauty,
Of no avail are our bridal robes.”⁴³

Guru Nanak compares his deep and selfless love in different ways - the love of the lotus for the water where inspite of the tossing of waves, the lotus remains clam and undisturbed; the love of the fish for the water who is not upset by the

force of the current and the surge and depth of water and can never get sunk; the love of the *Chātrik* for rain water, the drop of divine grace. Then there are two similes of a different kind indicating the condition of union and separation, firstly man and God united like water and milk, the water (the self of man) has to annihilate itself for the sake of milk (the Lord). Then the last simile of the *Chakvi* (ruddy sheldrake) brings out the fact that the beloved partner is all the time near at hand, but on account of darkness of ignorance, it is not able to see the beloved and waits and pines till at sunrise he discovers his beloved sitting close-by and the union takes place :

“My soul hearken unto me !
 Love thy Lord as the lotus loves water
 Buffeted by waves its affection does not falter.
 Creatures that have their being in water,
 Taken out of water, die.
 My soul ! if thou hast not such love,
 How wilt thou obtain release ?
 If the Word of the Guru is within us,
 We shall accumulate a store of devotion.”⁴⁴

William James⁴⁵ has mentioned four characteristics of the mystical vision - its *ineffability*, that it cannot be adequately described or explained, its *neotic* quality, that it is a state of insight or illumination, its *transency*, that is this experience lasts for a short time and finally its *passivity* that is the mystic will is held in abeyance and the devotee is, as it were, at the receiving end. In Guru's case, the mystical experience continues for all the time, i.e. his soul is full of ecstasy and awake to God. Even when Guru Nanak was weighing wheat-flour in the provision-store, his mind got in tune with the infinite and he kept on saying :

“*Terā*”, “*Terā*” (Lord, I am Thine, I am Thine.)

This vision is the result of the absence of ego which is the sole barrier between God and man. A trinity of subject, object and predicate is dissolved into a single reality. The devotee, spouse and love are merged in one.

“God is Himself the relish, the thing relished and the relisher.

He Himself is the beloved and the spouse.

My Lord is the enjoyer and pervades everywhere”.⁴⁶

Like the fish in the water, God is sole breath and being of Guru Nanak. His sole preoccupation in life was to be one with God. God is his power-house from where his soul got the light. Without Him, he is like a fused and futile bulb. The Guru remains in *Sahaj Samādhi*. He functions as an instrument of the Almighty. His own will is in complete harmony with the Universal soul and in a state of self-surrender and humility.

Another strong point of Guru Nanak's poetry is its *sublimity*. It enthuses and inspires the reader and its didactic tone is balanced by the delicacy of feeling and sincerity of utterance and the glowing images of human aspiration. Lyrical ardour, vivid realism and human idealism go hand in hand.

Guru Nanak's poetry is the vehicle of transformation. It can change an ordinary man into a man of God. He gets the inspiration and moral courage to overcome the traps, temptations and ordeals that lie on the spiritual path. His inner ocean of consciousness is so to say churned and he realises his divine possibilities. With dynamic optimism, the spirit of *Chardi Kalā*, he feels that as if he will become a godly person.

Finally, Guru Nanak's poetry may be called *Mantra poetry* because it contains both world-vision and soul-vision. Its sincerity, its soul-stirring words illumine our way to the

world of beauty and truth. It offers "a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the God-head in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well as the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised uplifting of his thought and feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of divine potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life, that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and now more clearly disclosed self of the universe."⁴⁷ In short, his poetry is a perfect mirror of his personality as a poet, a philosopher, a prophet, and a singer of divine love.

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3. Ibid, M. 1, p. 722-23.
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 Lālo.

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 Lālo.
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4. Ibid, M. 1, p. 991.
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.....
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.....
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Pair halāini pherani sir.
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 Pāhaṇu ntri pakhāliai bhāi jal mahi būdahi tehi.
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II

THE KIRTAN OF GURU NANAK

One of the greatest gifts of Guru Nanak to mankind is *Sabad-Kirtan*. The word *Sabad* means the Primal sound on the cosmic melody that prevails in the universe. It is the divine presence in all beings. *Sabad* is also the Revelation—the Holy Name—which brings one closer to God and frees man from sorrow and ego. Man's being in tune with *Sabad* is the gate-way to salvation. *Kirtan* is singing the glories of God. When the two are combined in *Sabad-Kirtan*, that is singing the praises of God with devotion, they produce the nectar which satisfies man's thirst and produces the spiritual *Rasa* which is beyond description. *Kirtan* is a harmonious blend of inner experience, emotion, music and rhythm. It is an outburst of sublimity and spiritual inspiration. The devotional music stirs the soul and transports it to the state of bliss. In this sacred music, "The *Rasa* (relish) is of the Divine and Divine consciousness which means the *rasa* of peace, of silence, of inner light and bliss, of growing inner knowledge, of increasing inner power, of the divine love, of all the infinite fields of experience that open to one with the opening of inner consciousness."¹ As an outlet of the love of the individual soul for the supreme soul, it does not need any external accompaniment or instrument. Guru Nanak says :

"Make wisdom the musical instrument,

Longing for the lord the accompanying drum,
This will awaken true longing,
And fill the mind with bliss.”²

This devotional and sacred music produces the unstruck music (Anahad nād) which continues within the soul :

“The illimitable unstruck music—*Anhad*—whose permutations ring within me.

Saturate my mind with the presence of my Lord.
Day and night imbued with the Lord, my liberated mind
finds peace in the Eternal Abode.

I am delighted while contemplating my Eternal Beloved,
Nanak says that those who are saturated with the
Holy Name hear the permutations of divine music.”³

The gift of sacred music was given to Guru Nanak by
God when he was summoned to God’s court :

“The minstrel chanted the Divine Revelation
In an ambrosial song,
Nanak says that through imbibing the praise of Truth,
The truthful has been attended.”⁴

So from his very childhood, Guru Nanak was fond of singing the Holy Word. The *Janamsakhis*, tell us that Guru Nanak as a boy collected his friends and asked them to chant God’s name and led others in hymn-singing. This gave joy both to him and his comrades. When he grew up, he made friends with a local minstrel called Mardana who was nine years senior to him. Guru Nanak got a *Rabab* from a craftsman named Firanda for Mardana. Some say that the Guru gave Mardana the present of a new *Rabab* on the occasion of his marriage. When the Guru moved to Sultanpur and took up the job of a store-keeper, he obtained employment for Mardana. He, Mardana and some other friends would sit down on the bank of the Vein Rivulet in meditation. Mardana played on the *Rabab* and the Guru led the singing.

After dinner, Mardana and others would gather at Guru Nanak's house and devotional songs were sung far into the night. This continued for about ten years and might be regarded as a period of apprenticeship for the missionary tours which the Guru undertook some time later.

Hymns for reform of individuals

During his missionary tours, Guru Nanak conveyed his message through appropriate songs which he composed on the spur of the moment and sang for the benefit of an individual or group of individuals. During his first tour, he came across a 'thug' named Sajjan. Apparently Sajjan was pious man but during the night he would murder his guests and loot their property. Guru Nanak sang a song to him in which he portrayed the criminal activities of Sajjan :

"Bronze is bright and shining,
Rub it and it gives out blackness,
And a hundred washings cannot remove it.....
When the accounting of all deeds will be demanded
The true friends will stand there by me."⁵

At Kurukshetra Guru Nanak exhorted the pilgrims not to regard vegetarianism as a passport to heaven. He sang :

"Only the foolish quarrel over the desirability of eating
flesh,
They are oblivious of true knowledge and meditation,
What is really flesh ? What is really vegetarian food ?
Which one of them is sin—infested ?
They differentiate not between good food and one which
leads to sin."⁶

When Guru Nanak reached Rameshwaram, he was invited by the Head-pandit to join in idol-worship. The Guru then sang the following hymn :

"Listen O Pandit, absorbed in the performance of ceremonial rituals,

The only action that secures true happiness
Is contemplation of his divine Essence...
If you churn curd, butter comes out of it,
If you churn water, you only get water.”⁷

Similarly to the Hath Yogis led by Bharthari who performed penances and physical mortifications, Guru Nanak revealed the householder’s way of *Sahaj-Yoga* :

“Hear, O Bharthri, Yogi Nanak, says after due deliberation”

The Holly Name alone is my support.”⁸

While passing through Islamic countries, Guru Nanak found that the fanatic Muslims were opposed to his preaching through Kirtan. When he reached Baghdad, he according to his routine, sang his hymns early in the morning, while Mardana played on the *Rabab*. Pir Dastagir and his followers came to the spot where Guru Nanak and his companion were singing. The gentle strains of their sacred music soothed the hearts of these Muslims. Their leader asked the Guru to prove the relevance of music for God-realisation. Guru Nanak explained to Pir Dastagir and his followers the true function of music. It is a potent instrument of both good and evil. It melts the human heart and thus can be a vehicle of spiritual inspiration. God, the great Musician has created the cosmic melody - the gentle rustle of the reeds and waving plants, the murmur of the rivulets, the gushing of hill-torrents, the humming of the bees, the chirping of the grasshoppers and the songs of the lark, the nightingale and other birds which constitute the orchestra of nature. Love of music is a part of human nature: Whenever a person is happy or alone, he sings or hums a tune. Why not use the natural instinct for music for spiritual development ! Why not sing holy songs in praise of *Allah* - the Lord of the universe ! This kind of sacred music attunes the individual soul to the

Universal soul. The baser tendencies and depraved cravings of man lose their edge; higher values and aspirations take their place. As such holy music is a great aid to spiritual fulfilment. The pir was greatly impressed by the Guru's argument in favour of Kirtan. He and his followers who had come to punish the Guru became his admirers.

Kirtan was the natural expression of the soul of Guru Nanak. One of his important hymns which was addressed to Pandit Brahmdas at Mattan in Kashmir in called the Song of Creation. The Pandit, in order to test the knowledge of the Guru, asked him about the origin of the universe.⁹ Guru Nanak sang the following hymn on the occasion :

“For countless aeons, there was a state of impenetrable darkness,

There was neither earth nor sky; the ordainment of the Omnipresent prevailed;

There was no system of days or nights, there was neither moon nor sun,

He was in non-procreating trance.”¹⁰

Through God's will, the world came into being and will continue to exist as long as He wants it.

After settling at Kartarpur in 1523, Guru Nanak established a *Kirtan-Ghar* or *Dharmasal*, in his own home, where the congregation gathered both in the morning and the evening. The participants worked on their farms and shops during the day, and in spare time took turns at the Free Kitchen to cook food and wash the dishes. These two institutions - *Sangat* (community worship) and *Pangat* (community kitchen) became the two main pillars of the Sikh faith, where equality was practised in worship, singing and sharing of food. According to Bhai Gurdas, every home in Kartarpur became, in due course of time, a *Dharmasal*, where the faithful gathered daily for hymn-singing. Guru Nanak

trained Bhai Lehna and later selected him as his successor. Before his death Guru Nanak sang the *Sohla* :

“The year and auspicious time for marriage with the Lord (death) are recorded;

O relations, meet and pour oil on me, the bride,

O my dear friends, bless me that I may unite with my Lord.”¹¹

The tradition of Kīrtan was carried on by the remaining Gurus and continues to this day in the Gurdwaras. The Gurus regarded Kirtan as the best and the simplest mode of worship in this dark age - *Kalyuga*. It obviates the need of ceremonial, ritual and penance and gives greater benefits than all these put together.

Fake Kirtan

Guru Nanak makes a distinction between secular and spiritual music. He tells us what is not-Kirtan or Fake Kirtan which is done by people for entertainment or the display of musical talents or the manifestation of the ego. He says :

“Songs, Vocal music in many rhythms are false,

They arise from the three qualities of maya and as such are subjects to decay,

Duality cannot dispel sorrow,

The Guru-oriented are liberated by singing God’s praises.”¹²

“Some people do Kirtan either for display or winning popularity :

They sing songs but their minds are full of vice;

They tell the people that by such singing vice is destroyed;

Without the true Name, the Falsehood in the mind is not removed.”¹³

Earlier Kabir had warned the people not to mistake Kirtan for an ordinary song :

“People regard it as a Geet, but it is a contemplation on God.”¹⁴

Of the popular *Kirtan-Mandalis* which go through the formal Kirtan-singing, Guru Nanak says :

“Symbals and ankle-bells are routine exercises,
The world is also like a drum.

The mercurial mind dances to that rhythm;
There is no place for the devoted and the virtuous in the world.”¹⁵

God is not won by singing with an ulterior motive.

“The Lord is not pleased by singing and recitation of Vedas,

Nor is He pleased by getting into the Yogi’s trance.”¹⁶

Benefits of Kirtan

For Guru Nanak, Kirtan has manifold benefits :

“One who does the Kirtan of Gopal (Lord),
Will not be afraid of the demon of death”.¹⁷

Kirtan not only removes anxieties but also alleviates sorrows and afflictions :

“Singing, listening to Kirtan with devotion in mind

Removes sorrow and brings lots of happiness to man”.¹⁸

Moreover, *Kirtan* washes away the filth of the ego and the evil inclinations. It purifies the mind and inspires one to lead a moral and virtuous life. It enthuses the disciple to emulate the qualities which we associate with God, as for example, truth, justice, fearlessness and compassion.

Let me recall a story which I heard in Iran (Persia) during my last visit. A group of Sikhs had settled there in a place called a “Duzdan—” which literally means the place of thieves. One day the ruler of that region happened to pass incognito through that village early in the morning. At that time, the Sikhs who had assembled in a house, were

as usual performing Kirtan. The ruler heard the sacred music as he stood outside the house. He was so much impressed by the devotion of the Sikhs that he changed the name of the Village to "Zahidan" which means a place of holy people. So great is the influence of Kirtan on the people who belong to other faiths.¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, Kirtan has a powerful effect on the human mind. Man's mind is mercurial and unstable. It flirts and flies from one thought or place to another. It is also full of tensions and desires. It lacks equipoise and peace. Kirtan calms the mind and makes it contented. It creates a feeling of repose and satisfaction. The inner significance of Kirtan lies in its mysterious process which stabilises the wandering mind and gives it a sense of peace. This concept is best understood through the principle of *resonance*. Just as in the case of two musical instruments which are identically tuned, if the strings of one instrument are touched, the strings of the other instrument will automatically vibrate in a similar manner, in the same way when one of the notes of Kirtan comes into harmony with the vibrations of the mind, the resonance is so strong that the mind vibrates to the feeling of the Kirtan itself. In this manner the mind is trained and channelised to attain calmness and repose. The Guru calls it *Sahaj*—the process of equipoise and peace. But for attaining this stage both personal effort—*Sadhana*—and God's grace are essential.

Hymns of God-realisation

According to Guru Nanak the greatest benefit of Kirtan is the realisation of the vision of God. This is obtained by linking one's consciousness with the meaning and the significance of the contents of the hymn and entering into its spirit. The devotee must try to share the feeling which Guru Nanak had when he sang that hymn. This will employ a

recreation of the milieu and ethos of that hymn. As soon as the corresponding emotion is produced, man loses his separateness and isolation and gets in tune with God. The melody produces a concentration on the Lord which leads to the spiritual vision. After all, the divine light is in the mind, while the senses are the servants of the mind. All co-operate in creating that blissful experience. This is called *Sabad—Surat*. One then gets a spiritual experience of indescribable exaltation. Guru Nanak in the *Sidh-Gosht* says as under :

“Sabad (Gurbani) is the Guru and Surat (consciousness) is the disciple.”²⁰

Elsewhere the Guru clarifies it from his personal experience :

“When the Surat awakens to the melody of the Sabad within, mind in the body becomes detached from sensual pleasures. My mind was absorbed in perennial music and through the Guru’s instruction it was attuned to the True Name. Devotion to God brings bliss, O Man ! Through the Guru’s instruction the Name tastes sweet and one is absorbed in it.”²¹

In another hymn Guru Nanak says :

“In the Dhuni is the meditation and in the Meditation one reaches the indescribable experience.”²²

“Then the blissful Dhuni creates unstruck music and through the spiritual experience of the Sabad, one realises the Pure Lord.”²³

Kirtan is a means of God realisation.

“The Jewel-like music, with the fairy family of measures and melodies,

Is the fountain of the pure stream of nectar;

The nectar is the Creator’s own, but few understand this secret.”²⁴

Kirtan leads to God-consciousness and the realisation of Truth :

“Instruct me how to sing thy praises,

So that I may remain imbued with the Truth.”²⁵

Apart from its spiritual value, Guru Nanak regarded Kirtan as food. Like a vegetable or fruit, the Raga of a hymn has a physical form—the notes (*roop*); it has also a flavour—the aesthetic relish; it has also a taste : taste like sweet, bitter, sour etc.—the *rasa*. It has also a nutritional element, spiritual nourishment. One who tastes this dish and digests it gets drunk with the divine nectar which is sweeter than the fruit or juice. The Guru called it *Amio rasa* or *Amrit rasa* :

The Guru describes the blissful condition of the devotee as under :

“Within him, the torrent of nectar uniformly rains,
The soul drinks, hears and reflects on the Holy Name.
It rejoices and delights day and night and sports with
God forever.”²⁶

Classical and Folk Music

Guru Nanak's 974 compositions can be divided under three categories :

1. Poems which are not set to Ragas, like *Japji*, *Salok Sahskriti*, *Salok-Varan-te-Vadhik*.
2. Hymns and salokas set to music in 20 Ragas and their variations.
3. Folk Music and Dhunies.

Guru Nanak composed his hymns in the following Ragas. Sri, Manjh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Bihagara, Wadhans, Sorath, Dhanasri, Tilang, Suhi, Bilaval, Ramkali, Maru, Tukhari, Bhairav, Basant, Sarang, Malar, Prabhati.

Sri Raga is one of the parent ragas in Indian classical music and the first raga of the Sikh Scripture. This raga is sung

in the evening and symbolises the darkness of the mind. In the hymns or Sri Raga, Guru Nanak has dealt with the existing ignorance, superstition and neglect of spiritual values on account of man's ego, greed and love of worldly pleasures. In Manjh Raga, he has given an account of the social, cultural and religious conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims in the age. Asa Raga is used by him in the popular morning *Var. Patti* (acrostic) is also written in the Raga. He has composed the *Alahaniya* in Wadahans Raga. *Aarti* is sung in Dhanasri raga. Ramkali Raga is popular with the Yogis, and as such Guru Nanak composed *Sidh-Gosht* in this Raga. In Tukhari Raga, he has composed the well-known song of the Twelve months called *Baramah*. Sorath Raga was the favourite raga of Guru Nanak; it suited his genius. He writes about it thus : '

“Sorath (Ragini) is beautiful if it brings to the mind the Lord of Truth;

The tongue is not polluted by slander or malice,

The tongue and the mind utter the Lord's praise.”²⁷

The *Dhunis* of Vars in Raga Manjh, Asa, Maru are indicated by Guru Nanak, To Vars composed by other Gurus, some of his Salokas were added by the Fifth Guru.

Besides these, Guru Nanak composed certain folk compositions and special poems like *Pahray*, *Suchaji*, *Kuchaji*, *Thiti*, *Oankar*, and *Sohilay*. The idea behind the use of folk music was to popularise Kirtan and to enable the congregation to participate in the chorus. Congregational singing eliminates the feeling of duality because the participants realise the divinity in each member of the *sangat*. Both classical and folk music speak the same language at different levels, and as such, folk music should not be regarded inferior to classical music. The base is the classical Raga but the *Dhuni* is the folk tune. The martial tunes the *dhunies*

were known to the singers of the day. The taraz of *Manjh-Ki-var* is of *Malak Murid Tathā Chanderharā Sohia di Dhunī*. Here the pauri begins with “*Tū Kartā purkhu agammu hai āpi srishti jpāti*” (A. G. p. 137). *Asa-di-var* follows the tune of Dhuni of *Tunday-Asrajai*. The text of the original taraz is *Bhabhkyā Sher Sardūl Rāi run mārū Vājai*. The pauri begins with the line : *Āpinai āp. Sājio āpinai rachio nāu*”. (A. G. p. 463). The third var is *Malar-Ki-var*. It follows *Rane Kailāsh tatha Mālde Ki dhunī*. Guru Nanak’s pauri begins with *Āpinai āpu Sāji āpu pachhāniā*.²⁸

A var is general intended to produce a heroic or martial feeling. Its diction is simple but emotional. *Asa-di-var* contains pauris of five lines each, along with salokas. The salokas of Guru Angad were added later by Guru Arjan and he directed that the *Chhants* of Guru Ramdas be also sung along with them on account of the similarity of contents. As the theme of the var of *Tunday Asrājai* is the victory of good over evil, in the same way, the subject of *Asa-di-var* is spiritual evolution and fulfillment. Hurdles in the path of divinity like academic disputation, hypocrisy, egoism and evil thinking are overcome by following the path of truth, virtue, meditation and the winning of God’s grace. Herein the Guru criticises the rituals of bathing, pollution, *Rās-lilā*, and Hindu sacred thread. The essence of the var lies in the pauris. As per tradition, the pauri is first sung and thereafter recited to enable the congregation to grasp the meaning thereof.

Congregational singing and chorus recitals were common in the days of the Gurus and thereafter. We have the two hundred-year-old account of congregational singing—form of the hymns by the sikhs in the article of Charles Wilkins.²⁹

When he visited in 1781 the Gurdwara at Patna, he was enchanted with the chorus-singing. He wrote : “The Book

was now opened and the old man began to chant to the tune of the drum and the cymbels, and at the conclusion of every verse, most of the congregation joined chorus in a response, with countenances exhibiting great marks of joy. Their tones were by no means harsh; the time was quick, and I learnt that the subject was a hymn in praise of the unity, the omnipresence, and omnipotence of the Deity. I was singularly delighted with the gestures of the old man; I never saw a countenance so expressive of infinite joy, while he turned about from one to another, as it were be speaking their assents to those truths, which his very soul seemed to be engaged in chanting forth."

Trends in Kirtan

Today Kirtan is done in *three* main styles. The first and the important one is the style of older musicians who follow the traditional tunes learnt from their ancestors. The Rababi tradition has almost come to an end with the establishment of Pakistan. Fortunately traditional *Sabad-Ritis* have been preserved by your University. The second mode of kirtan is singing the *Sabad* in any Raga. Generally, Ragis do Kirtan in this style. However their commercialisation of kirtan and performing it in imitation of film-tunes has eroded the value of Kirtan. The third mode is the congregational singing; what is called *Jotian-de-Sabad*, when the entire *Sangat* joins in chorus. Recently the American Sikhs have sung Sabads in Western style of string band music.

Research in the music of the Gurus is the crying need of the day. It is hoped that your department will take up some projects in this connection. Let me end my lecture on an optimistic note. The future of Sikh Kirtan is full of promise and hope. The popularity and the frequency of *Kirtan Darbars* is an indication of its bright future in the months to come.

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Anhado anhadu vājai ruṇ jhuṇkāre rām.
Merā manu merā manu rātā lāl piāre rām.
.....
Nanak sahaji mile jagjivan satigur būjh bujhāiai.
4. Ibid, M. 1, p. 150.
Dhāḍi kare pasāu sabadu vajāiā.
Nanak sachu salāhi pūrā pāiā.
5. Ibid, M. 1, p. 729.
Ujalu Kaihā chilkanā ghotim kālaṛi masu.
Dhotiān jūthi na utarai je sau dhovān tisu.
Sajaṇ sei nāli mai chaldiā nāli chalaṇni.
Jithai lekḥā mangiai tithai khare disaṇni.
6. Ibid, M. 1, p. 1289.
Māsu māsu kari mūrakhu jhagaṛe giānu dhiānu nahi
jāṇai.
Kauṇu māsu kauṇu sāgu kahāvai kisu mahi pāp samāṇe.
7. Ibid, M. 1, p. 635.
Suṇi paṇḍit karmākāri.
Jitu karami sukhu ūpajai bhāi su ātam tatu bichāri.
.....
Paṇḍit dahi viloiai bhāi vichahu nikalai tathu.
Jalu mathiai jalu dekhiai bhāi ihu jagu ehā vathu.
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Suṇi Bharthari Nanaku kahai bichāru.
Nirmal nāmu merā ādhāru.
9. Purātan Janam Sāhki, p. 92.

10. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, M. 1, p. 1035.
 Arbad narbad dhundhū kārā.
 Dharanī na gagnā hukamu apārā.
 Nā dinu rainī na chandu na suraju suñn smādhi lagāidā.
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 Sañbati sāhā likhiā mili kari pavahu telu.
 Dehu sajan asisariān jiu hovai sāhib siu melu.
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 Git rāg ghan tāl si kūrē.
 Trihu guṇ upajai binsai dūre.
 Dūji durmati daradu na jāi.
 Chhūtai gurmukhi dārū guṇ gāi.
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 Rāg suñāi kahāvahi bite.
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 Logu jānai ihu gītu hai ihu tau brahm bichār.
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Gurmukhi hari hari mithā lāgai hari hari nāmi smātai.
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Dhuni mahi dhiānu dhiān mahi jāniā.
gurmukhi akath kahāni.
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Dhuni anand anāhadu vajai gur sabadi niranjanu pāiā.
24. Ibid, M. 1, p. 351.
Rāg ratan pariā parvār.
Tisu vichi upajai anmritu sār.
Nanak karate kā ihu dhanu mālu.
Je ko būjhai ehū bichāru.
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Tere guṇ gāvā dehi bujhāi.
Jaise sach mahi rahau rajāi.
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Jhimi jhimi varsai anmritdhārā.
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**ESSENTIAL POSTULATES OF SIKHISM
AND
THEIR SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

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ESSENTIAL POSTULATES OF SIKHISM AND THEIR SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Contemporary Sikhism is in crisis. Caught up in an unprecedented situation the Sikh community is today at the crossroads of its destiny. While other living religions of the World are preparing to enter the twenty-first century with a renewed sense of missionary role and responsibility, in the aftermath of the collapse of secular leftist utopias, Sikh religion remains bogged down in the past. No doubt, modern Sikh scholarship can boast of qualitative standards, but there is little awareness of the challenges of modern times. The imperatives of the present day social and political reality remain unattended and the ideological concerns ignored. The sovereign identity of the Sikh doctrine is not yet fully realized by our scholars. The Vedantic idiom overshadows the exegesis of Sikh philosophy. Sikh spiritualism, Sikh ethics, Sikh polity and Sikh value pattern have not been woven into a coherent pattern. Ritualism is encrusting the spirit of Sikhism. Schismatic sects are breaking the organic unity of Sikh society. The heroic revolutionary tradition of Sikhism moulded by Guru Gobind singh is being confused with the aberration of violence both by the protagonists and opponents of the former.

The institutions of Sikhism inherited from its historical tradition have not been squared up with the social and political structures adopted from the Western secular traditions.

Take for instance the institutions of *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmata* that so well shaped the destiny of the Sikh people during the struggle for ascent to political power during the eighteenth century. The *Sarbat Khalsa* institution represented the unified *corporate* personality of the Khalsa with *Gurmata* at its uni-willed voice, born and becoming articulate in a numinous state of mind in the holy presence of the Guru Granth with an intuitive awareness that the Guru Panth is the manifest form of the Divine, a Self-determination of God, in its temporal aspect in historical time. The *Gurmata* as such was an instance of both self-transcendence and self-realization: it was not the subordination of the individual to the collective will. That is how the *Gurmata* was a categorical imperative inducing total and absolute willing allegiance. In other words *Sarbat Khalsa* is not of the nature of direct participatory democracy and *Gurmata* is not a kind of unanimous resolution or consensus. These institutions borrowed from the western secular traditions have altogether different premises in that they are based on unitized, atomistic individual wills which, when becoming like-minded, aggregate themselves into unanimous resolution, consensus or majority voice; and the individual will is, by accepted convention, subordinated to the collective will of the majority with the minority will taking a back-seat as a legitimate dissent. The point is that our twentieth century *Sarbat Khalsa* congregations are, except in form and name, nothing but indigenized copies of the political structures as they took shape in the western secular tradition in the era of bourgeois democracy based on the atomistic conception of society composed of men and women with separate individualities of their own. Hence the unresolved contradiction between the form and the essence of today's *Sarbat Khalsa*—a contradiction that affects the spiritual sanctity and moral authority of the

Gurmataas. Are we going to these lumpenization of the Sarbat Khalsa tradition ? who is responsible for this state of affairs ? The Sikh intelligentsia ? We have not been able to evolve new organic forms synthizing the religious and political institutions inherited from the Sikh historical tradition with the social and political structures that have come to us from the Western tradition. This is only one instance of the crisis in which Sikhism finds itself today. To overcome this crisis, we have to interpret the essential metaphysical concepts of Sikh religion in the modern perspective and to work out and understand their sociological significance in the context to contemporary social reality that throws up certain uneasy questions.

Has Sikhism reached an *impasse* where it requires an internal reformation for its survival and progress, *a la* the Protestant reformation that brought Christianity out of the middle ages into the modern times ? Do Sikhism and contemporary Sikh community have a common destiny in the sense that the survival and progress of the one depends upon that of the other ? Or do they have distinct destinies ? If so, what is the relationship between the two ? In other words, what is the nature of the existing relationship between the universal in Sikhism and its historical determination in the form of the Sikh community, as it has developed since 1699 ? Is the universal in Sikhism exhausted in its one concrete historical determination ? Is the self-development of the universal in Sikhism coming to an end, before its fullest expression ? Or will this self-developing logos have its further expressions in other historical determinations ? Will Sikhism provide a living ideology that could answer to the cultural, social and political concerns of the Sikhs arising out of their ethno-social and ethno-political development as an ethnos in interaction with the surrounding realities ? How are these

concerns, arising out of the given spatio-temporal context going to have orientating influences, if any, upon the future course of Sikhism as a religion and a philosophy ? I have not attempted to answer these questions here, nor am I capable of doing so. The light would come from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and in that light we have to face the present and look to the future as enjoined upon us by Guru Nanak :

Agon de je chetiai tā Kāitu milai sajāi

(But if one were to foresee and forethink,

why should he be punished thus). Guru Granth, P. 417

2

Before we examine the new revolutionary sociology of man introduced by Sikhism, let us first turn to its conceptual schemata.

The metaphysical concepts of Sikh religion bear only terminological similarity with their counterpart in Hinduism; their underlying signification is qualitatively different from Vedantic thought. No doubt vis-a-vis the pre-suppositions of Western thought, the postulates of Sikhism and the classical Vedantic tradition of Hinduism reveal some similarity of approach. But what is important to note is that the fundamental Vedantic postulate about the nature of time and its relationship to reality is different from that of Sikh philosophy. As such, the very system of signification of Sikhism's metaphysical concepts gets altered into a new structure of meanings. This is how the new structure of postulates of Sikhism constitute a distinctive phase in the evolution of Indian religions and philosophical thought. The distinctive connotative signification of the Sikh concepts as given in the *Mul Mantra* and elsewhere in Sri Guru Granth Sahib can be better understood in the semiotic structure of these postulates. This passage from the old to the new postulates

corresponds to the transition from the phases of religions-of-Being to the stage of religion-of-Spirit : Sikhism.

Vedantic thought in its generic form, involves what is known as spatial conception of time as distinct from historical time. Spatial time is conceived of as the space-like container of reality and partakes of all the qualities of space : homogeneity, unity, infinity, continuity, uniformity, directionlessness, reversibility and casual inefficiency. Accordingly, the Real (Sat) is that which remains eternal, that is, in the self-same, self-abiding state of *being* as distinct from *becoming* in infinite duration stretching from beginningless past to endless future. Anything which is of the nature of *becoming*, and is subject to the temporal processes of causation, origination, change, development, evolution and disintegration is not "real", but only *maya*, *mithya* or *leela*.

On the other hand, Sikh philosophy involves the conception of real, created, historical time. Time here is not infinity or eternity, but is historicity. That time is not a beginningless infinity is indicated by the expressing *Aad Sach, Jugad Sach* in Guru Nanak's Japuji. The term *Aad Sach* refers to logical priority of the indeterminate Absolute (Ik Onkar) before the creation of time, whereas the second term *Jugad Sach* reflects the historical primacy of the determinate reality of the Absolute *qua* Spirit in the beginning of (created) time (aeons—*jug*).

The conception of historical time is logically entailed by the conception of creation which is central to the Sikh doctrine. Material existence, phenomenal reality, the universe of man—all this is real creation and not illusory appearance or veiled manifestation caused by *maya adhyas*, that is, by super-imposition of man's determinate categories of cognition onto what is indeterminate Absolute beyond the grasp of these categories. Time being the mode of existence of

phenomenal reality, it has necessarily to be taken as co-created with material reality :

Oṅkār saī Jug bhae.

.....
Oṅkār utpāṭi.

.....
Kiā dinasu sabh rāṭi.

(God has created matter (mountains) and time (aeons).

Guru Granth, P. 929.

God has created all things, all beings—

And day and night also.

Guru Granth. P. 1003.

Acceptance of the historicity of time implies acceptance of the reality of becoming. In other words, Sikhism accepts the reality of the determinate becoming-in-time at par with the reality of the time-transcendent, indeterminate being.

In this context let us have a look at the other postulates of classical Vedantic tradition and Sikhism.

Western philosophy is based on classical Greek thought that believed in the multiplicity of universal objective ideas behind the multiplicity of particular phenomena given by man's perceptual mode. For instance, behind every particular straight line, there is the *idea* of straight line; the particular is only an approximation to the universal. These ideas, which are universal (common to all particulars), transcendental (that is, not substantially present in the particulars) and objective (being not the subjective product of the mind), have their being in a hierarchy headed by the Platonic idea of the Absolute Good. In other words, the Absolute, which is the ground and explanation of the particular phenomena is, in a sense, a multiplicity arranged in hierarchised unity. These objective ideas are replaced by subjective ideas of the cognising mind in the Cartesian tradition of Western philosophical ethos. On the other hand, Indian thought has postulated a unity (*sat*) underlying the multiplicity, the

variety, of phenomena (*tath*). This underlying unity, which is the ultimate principle ground and explanation of the phenomenal reality, is given the generic name of Brahman. The problem took the form of seeking the Absolute-in-itself behind or beyond its relational expression, as it appears to man through the limiting modes of his cognition, which as such represent coloured reflection of Brahman. In Western thought, it is the (Kantian) *a priori* categories that produce the distorted, coloured (relational) expression of the Real-in-itself; in Indian tradition this is due to the activity of *maya* which is objective and not subjective as in the Kantian pattern. In advaita Vedanta, the Absolute is the indeterminate (nirguna) Brahman *qua* pure, abstract Being with no determinate aspect of its own, nor having any real, determinate relationship with phenomenal (saguna) reality. The real rope only appears to be the illusory snake (vivataved), Becoming is not Real; it is only an illusory appearance of Being. In Sikhism, the Absolute-in-itself is indeterminate (nirguna) but It also becomes determinate as the Creator (Karta Purukh) and, further, admits of determinate relationship with man and his phenomenal reality, with his world of time and space, created by God. Ontologically this means not only the reality of determinate Being (as creative Spirit) but also the reality of determinate things in the realm of becoming. Epistemologically this means the validity of the human modes and categories of knowledge in their access to the essential reality of God Who really reveals Himself in His Names through these modes and categories. In other words, God determinates Himself in historical time through his creation, which as such is His Name (determinations) :

Jetā Kitā tetā nāu.

All that He has created in His Name. (Guru Granth, P. 4)

Another postulate of Indian thought is the belief in the postulated a unity (*sat*) underlying the multiplicity, the *a priori* identity of the individual and the Universal Self, of the subjective and the objective, of the "I" and "That" (*tat tvam asi*). Western thought in its generality involves one or the other kind of dualism between these two entities and is still struggling hard to integrate the subjective and the objective realms into some unitary order or principle of reality. In the Vedantic tradition of Indian thought, the identity of the individual and the Universal Self means only the identity of the two in their abstract beingness, and not in their organic determinate wholeness. Atman is a part or form of Brahman, the identity-relationship between the two being that of enclosed space and outer, unbounded, external space. The enclosedness of space corresponds to the embodiment of Brahman *qua* Atman in human form. Salvation would obviously mean here *the knowledge* that the inner and the outer are identical in nature. This is self-transcendence to a state of abstract being, where the self loses its concrete historicity, its organic existentiality, its subjectivity, its *nam rup* individuality. In Ramanuja's theistic Vedanta also, the determinate (*nam rup*) existential reality of the self is sought to be merged into the Absolute as an inflowing river becomes one with the ocean without retaining its distinctiveness. In Sikhism the conception of the *a priori* identity of the individual and the Absolute, of the particular and the universal, of the finite and the infinite, is of the nature of an organic relationship expressed in the unity of spirit in which the individual retains its subjectivity, its individuality, that is, its determinate existentiality :

Ek Joti dui mūrati.

(Two forms united in the oneness of spirit)

Guru Granth, P. 788

Self-transcendence here means self-realization in union with God. The human state of being, the bodily form, is

not a Fall, or a Kármic punishment in the shape of separation from Brahman; it is rather a God-given opportunity in which the self through self-realisation is transformed from an "object" into a "subject", full of self-consciousness and will power. He comes to partake of the qualities of the Divine given by the ethical attributes of God-head in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He, as such, becomes prepared as a self-conscious instrument for realising the Divine will on earth. The *a priori* identity of spirit between the self and the Absolute becomes an identification of the individual and the Divine Will, at which stage the victory of man in *righteous* action, as a categorical imperative, comes to be seen as the victory of the Divine (Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh).

Western thought believes that contradiction, opposition or tension is there at the centre of reality. Man becomes aware of the essential lack of harmony at the heart of reality after eating the apple of knowledge. The way to regain the lost paradise of harmony is *dialectical*; resolution of one conflict in a synthesis leads to another contradiction in a never-ending series, because the very matrix of reality contains inherent contradiction. Indian speculation on the other hand has posited *a priori* harmony in reality, as also the essential harmony between the micro and the macro reality. It is knowledge (Gian marg) that removes the *Avidya-based* veil of separation, discord and disunity and makes one realise the pre-given harmony at the heart of reality, as against the Western tradition in which knowledge led to the awareness of basic contradiction in the womb of reality. Brahman is not only *sat*, *chit*, but *anand* also, which means a state of harmony, calmness, equilibrium, equipoise. In fact this characteristic of Brahman flows from its homogeneity given by the underlying spatial conception of time.

In cosmic life this inner harmony is reflected in the Vedic concept of *rit* (a). In Sankhya philosophy the three *gunas* of prakriti subsist in a state of equilibrium the disturbance of which causes evolution of *Sansara*. In individual life, the principle of harmony takes the form of nirvan in Buddhism and smadhi in Yoga—the corresponding state in Sikhism being *Sahaj Avastha* but with a qualitative difference in that it is not a state of passive but a dynamic, active equilibrium. In Sikhism the Vedantic concept of harmony takes the form of orderliness of cosmos indicated by the term *hukum*. All elements of nature are working in orderliness.

Two other concepts, based on historical time, were correlated to this conception. First, that nature or matter contains not only the pattern of orderliness, but also the principle of motion and activity that makes the universe autonomously moving, and self-developing under Divine teleology, inherent in temporal processes that are seen as moving towards purposive direction for realising the Will of God *on earth*, just as the Khalsa was created for realising the Divine Will in *society*, in *history*, says Guru Nanak in Japuji :

Ekā māi jugati viāi tini chele parvānu.

Iku saṁsāri iku bhaṁdāri iku lāe dibānu.

Jiv tisu bhāvai tīvai chalāvai,

Jiv hovai phurmānu.

(Matter mysteriously conceived three sons. One produces, the second sustains and the third destroys).

The Sikh Prophet says here that matter in some mysterious union with consciousness conceived and came to partake of the three principles (symbolised by the three traditional Hindu deities) of origination, development and disintegration, which from within operate the universe, thereby making it an autonomous world with inherent temporal processes

programmed for realising God's design. The external Divine Will, having *once* charged the universe, works as the internal law (hukum) of the autonomous world :

Jo kichhu pāi su ekā vār.

(What He Willed, He put into the World—Once for all)

Guru Granth, P. 7

The notion of time and reality here is different from the Vedantic schemata woven around the formula that *the real is eternal and what is eternal alone is real*. On the other hand the world of time and space, of change, and development, in Sikhism, is impermanent but not unreal permanence (the continuation of a thing in its self-same state of being in all time) is no more equated with reality.

3

The classical Hindu tradition of thought that had equated permanence with reality in its conception of *sat*, based on spatial time, provided for stability of social system but at the cost of mobility, development and progress. The traditional role of the Hindu Avtar is just to restore the disturbed equilibrium by reasserting *Dharma* as the Divine obligation to perform the duties of one's Karma--determined, fixed station in life.

With its new conception of reality accepting the existentiality of change, Sikhism played a revolutionary role in heralding a new ethos, a new social system, grounded in new metaphysical postulates and concepts. A revolutionary value pattern emerged that was distinct and different from the earlier Hindu civilization. God, man and society were bound together in organic wholeness. The universe of time and place, being both *creation* and *abode* of the Divine, came to be looked upon as real. This worldly concerns of man,

as such, also came under focus. The self *in relation to God* retained its nam-rup existentiality; the Divine union meant the unity of spirit, and not the self-submerging unity of substance. Salvation, thus, came to be seen as self-realization in the Absolute (Jiwan mukti) and not self-annihilation. The self *in relation to society* kept intact its individuality, and was no more required to be subsumed under holistic categories of society (say of caste). Further, the self *in relation to itself* regained the organic unity of its spiritual, rational and sensory aspects in harmony known as *Sahaj awastha*. The innate goodness of man was stressed as also that of the human state of being. Evil was derived not from the aboriginal sinful nature of man, or the karmic recompense, or the state of embodiment of dissociated atman in phenomenal form : it was, rather traced back to the contingent imperfection and perversion of social system, with a belief in the essential perfectibility of society through collective, organised social effort. The earthly life of man was seen as possessing an autonomy of its own; with it secular life also came to have its own sanctity and was no more dismissed as the domain of the profane requiring ritualistic purification in its various stages. A new social structure was envisaged that provided for vertical mobility through a new process different from what has been termed as sanskritization.

The predication of reality in terms of permanence, constancy and eternity corresponds to the homeostatic tendency of traditional Hindu social structure with pre-determined fixity as its normative basis. Traditional Brahminical society was based on the notion of pre-determined, fixed hierarchy as the normative principle of social organisation; the caste system was the expression of this principle of fixity. Brahminical society permitted upward movement of the lower sections onto the higher levels through a cultural process named

sanskritization by M.N. Srinivas; a lower group of caste, having circumstantially acquired wealth or power, would be admitted into the higher structure of the caste-bound society only after giving up its original identity, and emulating and adopting the caste-denominations and behaviour-patterns of the higher castes. A lower caste was not conceded any sanctity or legitimacy in its own right and in its own self-identity, even if it had gained power and pelf. For instance in the South the *Shudra* rulers had to assume the *Kshatriya* status after undergoing a symbolic rebirth through the ceremony of golden cow; this was considered essential for getting political legitimacy as well as social respectability. Simulation and imitation of the ethos, manners and rituals of the higher group by a status-seeking lower group was considered necessary. This process of sanskritization made room for upward movement of lower sections, while reinforcing the fixed hierarchy of the system.

Revolting against the idea of fixed hierarchy as the normative principle of social organisation, Guru Nanak, in his equalitarian mission, rejected what later came to be described as the sanskritization process for upward movement and respectability at the higher levels of society :

Nichā andari nich jāti nichī hū atī nichū

Nanak tīn kī sāṅgi sāthī vadiā siu kīā ris.

Jithai nich samālīani tithai nadari teri bakhsis.

The lowest of low castes

The lowliest of the lowly, I seek their kinship

Why emulate the (so-called) higher ones

Thy elevating grace is

Where the down-trodden are looked after.

(Guru Granth, P. 15)

On the same wavelength, says Sant Ravi Dass that he who is most pious is *shudra* :

‘Ravidas jau at pvit hai, soi shudra jān’

Here was a new revolutionary approach that provided social equality, moral sanctity, political legitimacy and vertical mobility for the lower castes and sections of society in their own self-identity. It was this approach that was institutionalised by Guru Gobind Singh through the baptismal ceremony of amrit, thereby providing a new sociological principle, channel and process of vertical mobility that, *ipso-facto*, involves an ongoing process of restructuration of non-hierarchical, open society on the basis of equality. Nawab Jassa Singh, who attained to the highest politico-military leadership of the Sikhs in the eighteenth century, continued to be known as *Kalal* (distiller of wine) in self-glorification of his low-caste identity. This, in a sense, symbolizes the new value-system of Sikhism.

Another characteristic of the Sikh value pattern relates to the vesting of sovereignty in the Khalsa. The Divine Spirit descends in historical time through the Guru-person and becomes Self-determinate and manifest in society. The spiritual sovereignty of God becomes self-conscious in the Guru Granth and the temporal sovereignty of the Divine becomes immanent in the Khalsa Panth; here the Khalsa means a sociological category of full-fledged sovereign peoplehood. The notion of political sovereignty vesting neither in the King as his divine right, nor in any Vice-Deity like Christian Pope or Muslim Khalifa, nor in the State nor in the Party, but in Society brought India to be threshold of modern democratic, republican polity.

Sikhism involves a federal conception of polity and a pluralistic conception of society. The relationship of the individual to a society and of a group (religious, ethnic, etc.) to state is patterned after man's relationship with God in which he retains his self-identity—there being no submerging

of concrete existentiality into undifferentiated Oneness. On sociological level, this means that a group has an inviolable right to participate *in its corporate capacity* in the body-politic of society, and further that there should be no homogenization of individual or group identities into monistic uniformity.

Religious, cultural and political pluralism is the message of Sikhism for the contemporary world afflicted by the growing trends of State totalitarianism, political unitarianism and religio-cultural homogenisation. Sri Guru Granth Sahib is one of the greatest living examples of pluralism.

